We claim:

1   1.   A method for providing a relational view of electronic objects, comprising steps of:

2   obtaining organizing rules for organizing electronic objects;

3   applying the obtained organizing rules against one or more electronic objects, yielding

4   organized electronic objects; and

5   rendering the organized electronic objects.

1   2.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a hierarchical view.

3.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a nodal view.

4.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a network view.

5.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the rendering comprises a visual view.

1   6.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the electronic objects comprise at least one of

2   e-mail messages, textual documents, and image files.

1   7.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the organizing rules specify node-specific

2   organizing criteria for a multi-level index.

1   8.   The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating operation of

2   the applying step and the rendering step upon occurrence of a new electronic object.

1   9.   The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating operation of

2   the applying step and the rendering step upon modification of the organizing rules.

1   10.   The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating operation of

2   the applying step and the rendering step upon request of a user.

1   11.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the organizing rules specify one or more of

2   text characters, text words, and text phrases as organizing criteria.

1   12.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the organizing rules specify image files as

2   organizing criteria.

1   13.   The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of defining the organizing

2   rules, further comprising steps of:

3   retrieving a selection of categories;

4   enabling a user to select one or more of the retrieved categories; and

5   for each selected category, enabling the user to build at least one rule.

1   14.   The method according to Claim 13, wherein the step of enabling the user to build at least

2   one rule further comprises the steps of:

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3   retrieving a selection of organizing criteria;

4   enabling the user to select one or more of the retrieved organizing criteria; and

5   formatting a particular rule from the selected retrieved organizing criteria.

1   15.   A system for providing a relational view of electronic objects, comprising:

2   means for obtaining organizing rules for organizing electronic objects, wherein the

3 organizing rules specify node-specific organizing criteria for a multi-level index;

4   means for applying the obtained organizing rules against one or more electronic objects,

5 yielding organized electronic objects; and

6   means for rendering the organized electronic objects.

16.   A computer program product for providing a relational view of electronic objects, the

computer program product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

         computer-readable program code means for obtaining organizing rules for organizing

electronic objects, wherein the organizing rules specify node-specific organizing criteria for a

5 multi-level index;

6   computer-readable program code means for applying the obtained organizing rules against

7 one or more electronic objects, yielding organized electronic objects; and

8   computer-readable program code means for rendering the organized electronic objects.